WATERSENSE

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has partnered with a new program, WaterSense, to take further steps towards protecting the future of the nation's water supply. The program's main goal is to identify existing products that are water efficient, but still maintain performance levels similar to, or better than, their less-efficient counterparts. In order to use the label, companies must first sign a WaterSense partnership agreement, and second, pass their certification process. Ultimately, the program will make it easier for consumers to find and select water-efficient products with a label backed by independent laboratory testing and a third-party certification process.

The magic number appears to be 20, in that all the products certified must be at least 20% more water-efficient than standard products of their kind. Products must also provide measurable results, realize water savings on a national level, and of course maintain proper performance levels. Bathroom sink faucets and high-efficiency toilets are two examples of products that have already been certified. For outdoor water-use reduction, there is an extensive list of landscape irrigation services who have partnered with WaterSense, pledging their commitment to design water-efficient irrigation systems.

WaterSense is still a work-in-progress and has not yet established official criteria for all water-efficient products. They have issued notifications of intent (NOI) for certifying showerheads and urinals. Concerns for showerhead certification include maintaining safe temperature changes associated with fluctuating water pressure, while still producing at least a 20% reduction in water use. Discussion of which parameter is most important for qualification (maximum flow, spray patterns, pressure compensation, etc.) is still in progress.

Similarly, WaterSense is currently deciding on a maximum allowable flush volume for urinals. For the time being, waterless urinals are not considered for the WaterSense label due to the controversy surrounding their ability to effectively drain all waste particles. Studies in Germany found that drain line buildup of urine solids was substantial enough to reduce waste removal. WaterSense is awaiting the results of two similar studies taking place in the United States and intends to consider this data when finalizing their technical requirements for certification. If drain line buildup proves to be a significant issue, WaterSense will investigate the possibility of rigorous maintenance as a preventative technique.

Lastly, the most ambitious future goal of WaterSense is to certify entire new homes. Again, 20 is the magic number; thus, the home would reduce its overall water use by 20 percent or about 10,000 gallons of water per year. These new homes would also include appliances (dishwashers, clothes washers, etc.) with the more familiar EnergyStar label.

For more information on WaterSense and details about the certification process, refer to the WaterSense Program Guidelines:

www.epa.gov/watersense/docs/program_guidelines508.pdf

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Lists of approved products that are already available for purchase are located at the following Web sites:

http://www.epa.gov/watersense/pp/lists/ws_bathroom_faucets508.pdf

http://www.epa.gov/watersense/pp/lists/ws_het_list508.pdf

Additional information on current research involving waterless urinals can be found at the following study and responses:

http://www.cuwcc.org/urinal_fixtures/Dry_Urinal_Study_Rpt-Demiriz.pdf

http://www.cuwcc.org/urinal_fixtures/Dry_Urinal_Study_Review-Koeller.pdf

http://www.cuwcc.org/urinal_fixtures/Dry_Urinal_Tech_Response-Falcon.pdf